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UNCLAS VIENNA 003926

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA, EUR/AGS and EUR/ERA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN FORMIN PLASSNIK HAILS IRAQ ELECTIONS

1. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik issued a statement December 17 welcoming the Iraq elections. Plassnik stressed that the turnout was "an encouraging sign for Iraq's still-young democracy." She also detailed elements of the EU's Iraq policy during Austria's EU presidency in the first half of 2006.

2. Begin press release (translation by Austrian MFA):

Plassnik: "Encouraging signal for the young Iraqi democracy," December 17, 2005

Foreign Minister welcomes high turnout in parliamentary elections in Iraq

Vienna, 17 December 2005 - "The predominantly peaceful course and high turnout by all population groups in the parliamentary elections on 15 December are an encouraging signal for the still young democracy in Iraq," said Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, noting that the election was an important stage in the political transformation process in Iraq.

"The election has impressively demonstrated the support by a large majority of Iraqis for the development of a democratic Iraq. When the final election results are in, the rapid formation of a government and review of the constitution will be of great importance. Further stabilization is also contingent on improvements in the security situation and living conditions of the population," said Plassnik.

The review of the constitution would offer the Iraqi people the opportunity to establish a large consensus on the country's future and would help to create a political system encompassing if possible all democratic groups, added the Foreign Minister, pointing out that this important phase in political restructuring would take place during Austria's EU Presidency.

"The European Union is willing to provide its active support. Essential elements in the European policy with regard to Iraq during the Austrian EU Presidency will include continuation of the political dialogue between the EU and Iraq, further implementation of the Iraq framework and a possible prolongation of the work of the Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX)," stated the Foreign Minister.

(End press release).

McCAW